

France Admits Its Agents Sank Greenpeace Ship Under Orders

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PARIS — French Prime Minister Laurent Fabius last night admitted French responsibility in the sinking of the Greenpeace organization ship Rainbow Warrior and said the attack had been carried out by secret service agents acting under orders.

But Mr. Fabius, in a brief statement to reporters, didn't specify who gave these orders or whether top government officials had advance knowledge of the operation.

The admission further jolted French President Francois Mitterrand's Socialist Party government, which already faces a struggle to keep control of Parliament in national elections only six months away. However, political analysts said that so far Mr. Mitterrand's position wasn't threatened.

"Agents of the DGSE (the Direction Generale de la Securite Exterieur, a branch of the French secret service) sank this ship," Mr. Fabius said. "They acted on orders. This truth was hidden from state councilor (Bernard) Tricot," a senior civil servant who last month absolved France from responsibility in the bombing following a government-ordered investigation.

Standing at Mr. Fabius's side was Paul Quiles, who was named defense minister Friday following the resignation of Charles Hernu in the wake of fresh allegations that appeared to point to a cover-up by some French officials during Mr. Tricot's investigation. The government also dismissed Vice Admiral Pierre Lacoste, the head of France's foreign intelligence service, after he refused to answer questions by Mr. Hernu on his service's involvement in the bombing.

Mr. Fabius's statement marks the first official French admission of guilt since the so-called Greenpeace affair surfaced two months ago. While it contradicts the con-

clusions of the Tricot report and squarely puts the blame on France's secret service, it doesn't answer the crucial question of who ordered the attack and who precisely carried it out.

Political commentators believe that Mr. Fabius's statement is a bid to limit political damage for the government after successive press revelations made French officials look like they weren't saying all they knew. These analysts said that the manner in which Mr. Fabius made the announcement of the DGSE's guilt was designed to show that President Mitterrand and the government had no advance knowledge of the attack and were trying to get to the bottom of it.

Mr. Fabius said the government was in favor of establishing a parliamentary commission of inquiry to clarify the Greenpeace affair. He also said that a new head of the DGSE would be named by Wednesday and that his "prime task will be to reorganize all of these services."

The prime minister didn't explain what facts allowed him to conclude now that the DGSE was responsible for the bombing when only a few hours earlier Foreign Minister Roland Dumas said in a radio interview that there wasn't any proof of French guilt. But he said that his assertions were based on "the first conclusions of an inquiry into the Rainbow Warrior affair" by Mr. Quiles that "allow us to get closer to the truth."

French political commentators noted that the speed with which Mr. Quiles reached at least partial conclusions on responsibility appear to indicate that Mr. Hernu, even if he had no advance knowledge of the operation, covered up the DGSE's role out of loyalty to some of his subordinates. Mr. Quiles, who was Transport, Housing and Urban Development minister previously and comes to the Defense Ministry with a reputation of ruthlessness, wasn't bound by such loyalty, these commentators added.